

# Generations

by Chloe McNeil

The loud crash of glass smashing down onto hardwood flooring caused Diane's wrinkled neck to turn from the soup she was stirring. She jogged in and on the table, her four-year-old granddaughter, Abby, was staring down at the mess of glass and red, fruit-punch-flavored juice. She clapped her tiny hands together and giggled. Diane angrily shook her head and marched in front of Abby, a foot away from the eye-catching chaos.

"Abigail, how many times do I have to tell you to listen to me? I am not like your father. I will punish you. When I was a child, I got spanked with a paddle. I still have the paddle my dad used to use on me." Diane breathlessly yelled at Abigail, squeezing her right hand into a fist.

Abby glanced up at her grandma, down at the mess, and turned around to finish eating her gummy bears and banana slices. Diane's eyes widened and she thought, *what a little shit!* She snapped her fingers right behind Abby's head.

"Listen to me very hard and clear, dear, or you'll regret turning your back to me. I'm going to get a broom and a towel. I'll sweep, and you will mop and wipe the mess you made up. After that, you'll sit in a chair and stop treating my table like a jungle gym."

Abby nodded in acknowledgment but didn't turn around, not wanting her grandma to see the tears rolling down her cheeks and onto her lips. She licked away at the salty drops and sniffled once her grandma's slapping footsteps were in the other room. Abby stuffed a gummy bear into her mouth and pushed over the remaining few in front of the open spot to her right.

Diane grabbed the broom, dustpan, and a black towel as quickly as possible. She did not want her floors stained or Abby or even the cat, Marcus, to step into the pointed shards. When she walked back into the dining room, Abby had picked a seat to pick in and was standing next to

the mess, waiting to help clean up. Diane smiled in pride at herself and Abby for realizing it was better to cooperate and do as she was told than to object or ignore.

The shards were varying sizes but, luckily enough, were primarily big. The pieces that couldn't be retrieved would be mopped up with the towel, and later on, Diane would soak it in water and let the tiny shards slide down the drain.

Abby wiped furiously and efficiently at the mess, ensuring no drop was visible or left on the planks. Diane watched Abby's small body work much faster than hers, causing Diane to huff. She might not move as quickly, but she was much more proficient at cleaning and the hobbies they shared.

"Let's go watch some TV before your father gets here. I'll be informing him about your accident."

"Okay, Grandma," Abby answered and grabbed her water bottle.

Marcus lay on his belly on the living room couch, catnapping away the day. As usual, he was not awoken but was content with Abby scratching the spots behind his ears. He woke up and climbed into her lap, meowing when she didn't scratch or softly stroke his head or belly.

The armchair was undisturbed and clean and stationary, just as Diane left it. The evening news was on, and Diane pulled the lever for the armchair's leg rest to come out. She turned up the volume and listened intently as the reporters discussed a recent double homicide. According to the reporters, a man had stalked, killed, and thrown the bodies of his ex-wife and her younger brother in the river by a warehouse a couple blocks in between their houses. The man had yet to give his statement about the situation, and his court hearing was in a few weeks.

"People these days don't have any decency. Abby, make sure to never get with a man who will snap like that," Diane commented and stared into Abby's green eyes. "You can always

tell if someone is gonna kill or hurt ya. Just come and tell me, grandma's got your back." Diane winked and turned away, focusing on the weather reporter.

The crunching of twigs and sticks made Marcus's ears perk up, and Abby knew her dad was there to pick her up. She jumped up from her spot and stopped right before the TV, gulping as she made sure not to be in her grandma's line of vision (of the TV).

Diane waved her hand, signaling she didn't mind, eyes not even peeking over to where Abby stood. Door hinges squeaking in protest propelled Abby to run at her dad, Brandon. Brandon reached down and pulled his daughter tight against his chest.

"Hi, my sweet girl; I missed you so so so much," Brandon exclaimed, peppering her face and tight curls with wet kisses. She laughed and breathed in the smell of her father. Pine and a strong odor that was either "perfoom" or "colog" (as she pronounced it).

"Dad, dad, dad. I missed you too!" Abby slobbered on her dad's cheek and belly laughed at the way he grimaced. His face resembled a goblin.

Abby jumped down and sprinted through the dining room and into the hallway to grab her bags from the guest room. Meanwhile, Brandon strolled into the living room and waved at his mother.

"Hey, ma, how did everything go?"

Almost seemingly ignoring him, Diane half-heartedly waved back and replied, "Just like it always does. Children are a pain in the ass, but we had some fun."

Brandon rolled his eyes and leaned against the wall to his right. "Okay, ma. What did she do this time?"

Diane, not recognizing the sarcasm and anger in Brandon's voice, took this as an invitation to inform him of her misdeeds.

“Well, she did a lot of things she knew were wrong, like running in front of the television when I was watching my show and whining before she went to bed, but the worst was when she purposefully pushed her glass cup onto the floor. She was on the table, and I told her to get off thrice.”

“Ma-.” Brandon went to tell his mother off but, per usual, it was a waste of air and effort.

“Oh! I forgot to mention her cup was filled to the tippy top with red juice. So, it was even worse because it could have stained my floors.”

Abby clambered out of the hall, her purple star-covered bag slung on one arm and her school backpack, a llama’s face, on her back like she was leaving for school.

Brandon turned his mother’s ramblings out and reached for the bag on Abby’s arm.

“Hey! She’s not a little baby; make her carry her own bags. You’re not her slave.” Diane hissed in disgust.

Brandon glared at his mother, swung Abby’s bag onto his arm, and reached out his hand for Abby to give him her backpack as well.

Diane stood up, turned around to fix her armchair, and looked at Abby's and Brandon's faces.

“Dammit, why can’t you just listen to me!”

“Go out to the car, honey, buckle yourself up. Wave by to Grandma before you head out, too. I’ll be there soon.”

Abby waved bye to her grandmother and blew a kiss to Brandon. He smiled as she left the house, the screen door clicking behind her. Brandon adjusted the bags on his arms and strode over to the TV. He stood before it, ensuring he had his mother’s full attention.

“I let Abby come and spend the night with you, hoping you guys could get along and bond. But, of course. You have to be selfish and cruel. She spilled a drink, Mother.”

Diane turned her nose up in anger and disgust at the tone and words that her son directed at her.

“Now, you’re going to give me the silent treatment and scream and yell at me when I’m about to leave. Just talk now because it might be a bit before Abby and I return.”

Diane laughed, her face displaying pure enjoyment. “Like that’s going to upset me. I am more appalled by the fact that you think you can talk to me like I’m the child and your parent. Remember whose house you are in.”

Brandon simply shook his head in disbelief. He could not handle much more of this. Every. Single. Time. He would bring Abby over, or the two of them would come and make dinner with her or cookies for her. It didn’t matter. There was always a problem. Something that she just couldn’t handle.

“Bye,” Brandon replied defeatedly and left his childhood house. The sound of the leg rest lifting up told Brandon all he needed to know.

Abby stood beside their gray minivan, patiently waiting for her dad to drive them home. She knew he was upset with the way he stared at the ground, only peering up to ensure he wouldn’t run into a tree. She jogged to the driver's side and wrapped her arms around her dad’s legs. She was squeezing so hard that her ribs started to hurt.

Brandon crouched down to her level and put his face into her tiny shoulder, merely enough room for him to hide his watery eyes. He silently sobbed and attempted to keep from falling apart in front of his daughter. She rubbed her little hands on his back and shoulders, quietly “shushing” and saying, “It’ll be okay, Daddy.”

As the two embraced and found comfort in each other's loving presence, Diane secretly watched, peeking out from the front window curtain. A gasp caught in her throat, and she shook slightly.

How could someone so small be so helpful? She was only a child, wasn't she? Diane moved away from the window, scratching her wrinkled thigh as punishment. She was not a slave to her emotions like them.